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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 000093

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (ADDRESSE CORRECTED)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/27/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MASS](#) [KDEM](#) [PINS](#) [GV](#)
SUBJECT: DASD WHELAN SCORES RARE ENCOUNTER WITH GUINEAN
PRESIDENT CONTE

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Classified By: DCM Julie Winn for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) SUMMARY. In a surprise development, Guinean President Lansana Conte received Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for African Affairs Theresa Whelan at the Presidential Palace on January 25. Plagued by poor health, Conte has not to our knowledge held any meetings with persons outside his government since a brief spurt of activity just before the New Year. Thus, the fact of the meeting was as important as its content. Conte (or his entourage) may have wished to assure us that he is still president, even as succession talk grows more open. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Guinean Chief of Defense Staff General Kerfalla Camara informed the Ambassador on the margins of a reception given in DASD Whelan's honor the evening of January 24 that President Conte would like to meet with her. The Ambassador, COL Vic Nelson (OSD), DCM and DATT accompanied DASD Whelan. General Kerfalla, Ministry of Defense Cabinet Director (de facto Minister of Defense) COL Kande Toure, and Presidential Secretary General (chief of staff) Fode Bangoura also attended.

¶3. (S) In their 20-minute encounter, DASD Whelan highlighted the years of fruitful U.S.-Guinea military cooperation, citing her visit to Guinea in 1993 in connection with navy projects we were then undertaking. She welcomed her discussions the previous day with Conte's staff on where our cooperation might go from here, noting DoD assistance in the fight against HIV/AIDS and our willingness to look for ways to respond to Guinea's request for help in improving its capacity.

¶4. (S) DASD Whelan remarked on the USG's work with Liberia to further stability there. She hoped that a more professional Liberian military would cooperate more effectively and positively with neighboring forces in the Mano River Union to contain conflict. Her visit to Guinea, she said, aimed to emphasize cooperation here as well. Guinea's restraint in the face of border provocations over the years, as well as its concrete contributions to peacekeeping (e.g., ECOMOG,) have been important in preventing further spread of conflict in the region. Thanking President Conte for Guinea's contribution, DASD Whelan added that the Guinean military has demonstrated that it has much to offer in promoting stability and democracy in the region.

15. (S) President Conte expressed several times his appreciation for ongoing U.S.-Guinean relations. He said that Guinea relies on cooperation with the U.S., welcomed the DASD's visit and hoped it would not be the last. Guinea is not jealous of USG assistance to its neighbors, he stressed, since the populations are related across borders, and anything that helps Liberia and Sierra Leone is good for Guinea as well. He hoped that the U.S., which he observed is in the forefront of helping to calm the region, would continue its work until the region is at complete peace.

16. (S) To the Ambassador's question on Cote d'Ivoire, President Conte averred that the conflict there could be resolved quickly if the international community acted uniformly in supporting the elected government and denied support to its opponents. Backing both sides simultaneously or attempting to impose a leader from the outside only escalated the conflict, although the Ivoirian government should certainly be encouraged to represent all the people.

17. (S) COMMENT: The fact of this meeting was as important as its content, given the rarity of President Conte's receiving visitors. His state of health remains variable day-by-day: Conte was seated when the delegation arrived, but stood up without assistance to say good-bye. He appeared reasonably alert, tracked the discussion without losing its thread, and was appropriately responsive throughout. His feet appeared somewhat swollen, and his right foot had a small sore. Since Conte had kicked off his sandals, it was clear that all toes were intact (i.e., no amputation yet despite his advanced diabetes). Always a heavy smoker, he had three cigarettes during the conversation. Although the topic was not raised with President Conte, his staff may or may not have briefed him on the discussion between DASD and senior military officers (septel) regarding the military's role in any succession scenario. As transition talk grows louder in Guinea, Conte and his entourage may have wished to assure the highest-level Washington visitor in some time that he has not yet fallen out of the saddle.

18. (U) This message was cleared by DASD Whelan.

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18. (U) This message was cleared by DASD Whelan.

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